

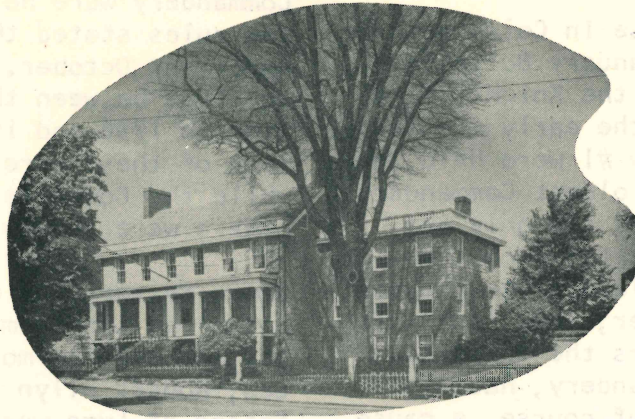
New London County Historical Society

11 Blinman Street

SHAW MANSION

New London, Conn.

Quarterly



Bulletin

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THE SOCIETY DEPENDS ON YOU

The campaign for funds to cover the authors' fee for writing the history of New London was launched early in April. The Society's administrative staff worked overtime to get many hundreds of letters in the mail, inviting the membership and others in New London and the surrounding areas to contribute to this important project.

To date, the results have been encouraging. To our surprise, the greater number of contributions have been made by non-members. This indicates a widespread and generous interest in the New London history, and satisfaction in the choice of the authors. The prestige of the Shepard name among readers and writers is of inestimable value. The prospect of a new telling of the New London story possesses a tremendous appeal.

A good beginning has been made. As we start our climb toward the peak, the path ahead looks long and difficult. The goal is a shining one. We shall exert every effort to reach it.

You, the members of the Society, can be of tremendous aid. Your enthusiastic consent to the launching of this endeavor gave us courage to start out. We depend on your contributions of dollars and names of prospects in order to keep going.

Please send us your contributions now and let us have the names of friends who may be interested in helping us to reach our goal. It seems important to be able to contract this year with the authors for the beginning of their task. Such a beginning will make it easier for us to publish in 1960, the centennial of the second edition of Miss Caulkins' fine work.

The Society depends on you to do your part.

LEAGUE MEETING IN WALLINGFORD

The annual meeting of the Connecticut League of Historical Societies will be held Saturday, May 17 at the First Congregational Church in Wallingford. The business session at 10:30 will include the election of officers. It will be followed by an historical sketch of Wallingford by Mr. Elmer D. Keith, founder of the League.

The afternoon session, following a box lunch, will include an illustrated talk on early American silver by Mr. Philip Hamerslough, a noted collector and authority on Colonial silver. Dr. Edward Wallace will describe the low cost of dismantling, moving and reassembling of the Tracy Homestead of Norwich. (Mr. Tracy was the famous maker of Windsor chairs.) Dr. and Mrs. Wallace have done much of the interior restoration themselves and have created one of the most interesting houses in the Wallingford area.

A visit to the Samuel Parsons House (1770) will conclude the program.

NOTES ON THE DEMING HOUSE (continued)

The Jonathan Deming House in Colchester of which we wrote in the January Bulletin aroused our interest in the Knights Templar because several of the early meetings of Washington Commandery #1 were held in the house. This is the oldest Commandery in the United States, and the only one that ever received a charter from the Grand Encampment of England. The charter, which was dated September, 1803, and which post-dated by seven years the organization of Washington Commandery, has since been lost and this is, of course, a cause of great sorrow to the Masonic order.

Sometime during the month of July, 1796, "three regular Knights Templar, hailing from three different commanderies, formed an encampment at Colchester, in the state of Connecticut, at which time the following Royal Arch Masons had regularly conferred on them the Order of Knighthood, to wit: John R. Watrous, Asa Bigelow, Roger Bulkeley, John Breed, Joel Worthington." ¹ Not mentioned in this list are the officers: Eliphalet Bulkeley, Captain-General, the first on record for this Commandery; James Baxter, First Captain; Henry Champion, Second Captain, and Ebenezer Perkins, Marshal. Bigelow was Treasurer and Watrous Secretary.

Wooster Lodge then met at John Breed's Tavern on South Main Street (the Avery house) in Colchester, and it seems very probable that the meetings of the Commandery were held there too. It was not until 1801 in fact that meetings of Wooster Lodge were held in the Deming House, and David Deming, son of the late Jonathan, did not join the Lodge until 1802. He charged the Lodge for the use of his hall and for the entertainment provided. This, however, may not be as strange as it sounds, because a mileage rate of twelve and a half cents was allowed "each Sir Knight, if the funds would allow, and if not, then to receive an equal proportion of the funds." ¹ The Lodge evidently expected to pay all the expenses of meetings. Deming was a merchant, owned a calico factory in Hebron, was a prominent officer in the cavalry of the militia and was not a tavern keeper.

He went on in Masonry to become a Knight, holding the office of Second Captain in 1810. He died in 1827.

From the very beginning the meetings of the Commandery were held irregularly, though the rules stated that they should be in April and October. There were thirty-three meetings between the time of the organization in 1796 and its lapse in 1829. Fifteen of these were in Colchester, three while the Commandery met at Deming's. The others were in New London and Hartford.

James Baxter, the original First Captain was a New London man, and Eliphalet Bulkeley was soon to move here. In 1801 Lyman Law, Robert Allyn of Groton and Nathaniel Matson of Lyme were admitted to membership, and there continued to be a steady enrollment from this quarter through the years. New London and its environs made up forty of the one hundred and seventy nine members. Familiar names appear in the roster: Hezekiah Goddard, Lewis Allen, John O'Brien, Nathaniel Shaw Woodbridge, Sabin K. Smith, Daniel B. Hempstead, Elias Perkins, John Danforth, Thaddeus Brooks and George W. Rodgers, Commodore, USN. These few were typical.

In 1810 the first meeting was held in New London, and in 1822 one was held at Hartford. The following year the circuit was enlarged to include New Haven. In 1844 Washington Commandery was moved from Colchester to Hartford, where it is still active. None of the jewels, aprons or curtains could be found at the time of the move, though two charters were located then.

Eliphalet Bulkeley on his expulsion from Yale returned to his native Colchester, where he married and pursued a career as farmer, merchant, local office holder and tavern keeper. It was not until he was forty-five that he joined the Masons, but he then made up for lost time by taking "all the degrees this side of the Atlantic" at a rapid clip. He it was who, as deputy Grand Master, installed the charter officers of Union Lodge in 1796. Four years later when Free Masons Hall was built by Union Lodge as an inn, Bulkeley came to New London to manage it. The inn was on the corner of Masonic and Union (named for Union School, not for the Lodge) Streets and later became the Smith Memorial Home. Bulkeley stayed here until 1804, and in

1807 moved to Wilkes-Barre, Penna., where he again was an inn keeper.

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This article would not have been possible without the generous assistance of James R. Case, historian of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut. John Masterton lent the History of Washington Commandery to which the superscribed ¹ refers. To both of them go our grateful thanks ---L.P.L.

A MOTHER'S DAY GIFT IN MEMORY OF PHEBIE P. KENYON

Another charming costume has been added to the Society's collection by the gift of Mrs. George F. Hicks. This two-piece wedding dress in the basque-waisted, bustled style of the 1880's is of grey brilliantine trimmed with rows of puffed slate-blue taffeta and pearl buttons.

Mrs. Hicks, in her presentation, has given us the family background of the dress as follows: "The wedding dress of Phemie Patience Kenyon is a gift from her three living children - Edith (Mrs. Strong G. Gardner), Clinton (Mr. Clinton H. Kenyon), and Marguerite (Mrs. Frank W. DeWolf), presented by her granddaughter, Mrs. George F. Hicks (Hazel Kenyon Gardner.)

"The dress was worn on the occasion of Phemie's marriage to William Edward Kenyon of Waterford, Conn., in Westerly, Rhode Island in February of the year 1880. The Reverend John Evans, pastor of the First Baptist Church, performed the ceremony.

"Will and Phemie lived for several years on Pepper Box Hill in Waterford. They had six children, Edith, Claude, Norman, Clinton, Wolcott and Marguerite. Later on the young family moved to a farm in Cohanzie, also in Waterford, where Mr. Kenyon built the first sizable greenhouse in this area. He raised many fancy vegetables, including celery, which was a rare delicacy in those days. Both Mr. and Mrs. Kenyon were members of the Huntington Street Baptist Church in New London. Mr. Kenyon was a deacon.

"Grandmother liked to think of her home in Cohanzie as "The House by the Side of the Road". And she loved Whittier's poem "Snowbound" because it described so clearly a snowstorm she remembered well.

The sun that bleak December day
Rose cheerless over hills of gray.

"These things and many more I remember about my grandmother. Her wedding dress, every stitch taken by her hand, has been cherished by the family for many years, and now it is the thought that perhaps others might enjoy seeing it. So the gift on this Mother's Day by her children, that it may be shared by many."

LYME SOCIETY'S EXHIBIT TO CENTER AROUND UN

The Lyme Historical Society will have a United Nations exhibit as the first of the summer shows at the Florence Griswold House in Old Lyme. Featured will be a UN project done by the world history class of the Old Lyme High School under the direction of Miss Ruth Prest, head of the school's history department. The class has worked on this for many weeks, and it made a special trip to UN headquarters to get background material.

Many residents of Lyme and Old Lyme, both members and non-members of the historical society, are lending valuable items from around the world. The officers of the Society hope that people will lend things of historic, artistic or literary merit, especially from small countries.

The exhibit will be open to the public starting on Sunday, June 15th, every day except Monday from 2 to 5. A private showing will be held on Saturday, May 24th. This will be for members of the Old Lyme League of Women Voters and their guests from the UN in connection with the League sponsored UN weekend. The Women Voters' League is also helping to set up the exhibit.

LEND AN EAR TO THE PAST

The Darien Historical Society's Annual contains an interesting "Memo on Interviews". Since its organization in 1954, the Interviewing Committee has endeavored to obtain first-hand information about the town and the surrounding area in earlier days from long-time residents. An interviewing guide, developed by the Committee, is used. Eleven interviews have been completed and two are in progress. The society is admittedly experimenting since it has not been able to

learn of other societies which gather and record information in this way.

This is a most worthy effort. Something of the sort has been done by Mrs. George F. Hicks, whose recollections of an earlier time accompany the gift of her grandmother's wedding dress, described in this issue.

The Society welcomes documentary material of this sort, with or without accompanying gowns or other relics. Each of us, through our family, has a link with the past. A little perseverance will produce a reasonably accurate account of earlier times that will stimulate the student of tomorrow.

For Your Information

The Society's telephone number is
Gibson 3-1209

The Mansion is open Tuesday through
Saturday from 1 to 4.

Custodians in residence:

Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Holmes:

Secretary and Curator:

Miss Helen I. Fraser

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